Research Assistant Training

Tips & Tricks for Finding (Reliable) Web Content

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What we will cover

- Assessing Reliability
- Finding Statistics
- Tips for Internet Research
Reliable sources

• Evaluate sources for:
  • Authority – author is identified, reputable, credentialed
  • Objectivity – fairness, lack of bias
  • Accuracy – provides references to sources, verifiable
  • Scope – relevant to your topic and argument
  • Currency – may vary by topic, but make sure you know the current state of thinking in your field (even if it’s rooted in older writings)
Finding Statistics
What we will cover

- Getting started
- Government Sources
- NGOs
- Things to Remember
Getting Started

- First, look for news or journal articles for references to specific studies or data
- Look for study reports, not raw data
  - It can be useful to have access to the data, but you don’t want to be in a position of having to do data analysis
Government Statistics

- Government Agencies tend to have a lot of statistical information.
- The hard part can be figuring out which agency you’re looking for.
- Try [https://usa.gov/statistics](https://usa.gov/statistics)
These federal agency programs collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical data and information:

- **Bureau of Economic Analysis** collects information on economic indicators, national and international trade, accounts, and industry.

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics** reports on justice systems, crime, criminal offenders, and victims of crime.

- **Bureau of Labor Statistics** measures labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the U.S. economy.

- **Bureau of Transportation Statistics** provides data on airline on-time performance, pirates at sea, transportation safety and availability, motorcycle trends, and more.

- **Census Bureau** is the main source of data about our nation's people and economy.

- **DAP Public Dashboard** provides a window into how people are interacting with the government online.

- **Data.gov** is the home of the U.S. Government's open data. Find federal, state, and local data, tools, and resources to conduct research, build apps, design data visualizations, and more.

- **Economic Research Service** informs public and private decision making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development.

- **Energy Information Administration** provides data on U.S. use of coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy, and more.
NGO Sources

- Think tanks, policy institutes, advocacy organizations, academic centers, professional organizations
- Nat’l Center for State Courts
- Nat’l Center for State Legislatures
Things to Remember

- Be aware of bias
  - Read the reports critically. Does the conclusion actually follow from the data?
  - Research authors/funders to find out what kind of slant they might have

- Look for counter evidence
  - Make sure you’re being balanced in your approach to the research
Internet Research
Internet Research Tips

- Advanced Google Searching
- Google Scholar Settings
- Internet Archive / Wayback Machine
- URL Parsing
Advanced Google Search

- Google has advanced search functions
- Easiest way to find it is by searching for “Google advanced search”
- Or go to google.com/advanced_search
Advanced Search

Find pages with...

To do this in the search box

all these words:

Type the important words: tricolor rat terrier

direct quotes:

this exact word or phrase:

Put exact words in quotes: "rat terrier"

OR:

any of these words:

Type OR between all the words you want:

miniature OR standard

OR:

none of these words:

Put a minus sign just before words you don't want:

-rodent, -"Jack Russell"

OR:

numbers ranging from:

Put 2 periods between the numbers and add a unit of measure:

10..35 lb, $300..$500, 2010..2011
Then narrow your results by...

- **language:** any language
  Find pages in the language you select.

- **region:** any region
  Find pages published in a particular region.

- **last update:** anytime
  Find pages updated within the time you specify.

- **site or domain:**
  Search one site (like wikipedia.org) or limit your results to a domain like .edu, .org or .gov

- **terms appearing:** anywhere in the page
  Search for terms in the whole page, page title, or web address, or links to the page you're looking for.

- **SafeSearch:** show explicit results
  Tell SafeSearch whether to filter sexually explicit content.

- **file type:** any format
  Find pages in the format you prefer.

- **usage rights:** not filtered by license
  Find pages you are free to use yourself.
this exact word or phrase: climate change

Put exact words in quotes: "rat terrier"

any of these words:

Type OR between all the words you want: miniature OR standard

none of these words:

Put a minus sign just before words you don't want: -rodent, -"Jack Russell"

numbers ranging from: to

Put 2 periods between the numbers and add a unit of measure: 10..35 lb, $300..$500, 2010..2011

Then narrow your results by...

language: any language

Find pages in the language you select.

region: any region

Find pages published in a particular region.

last update: anytime

Find pages updated within the time you specify.

site or domain: sandiego.edu
Climate Change & Regional Planning - School of Leadership...

Climate Change & Regional Planning. How is Our Climate Changing? The San Diego region's climate, like all others, is changing and threatening...

People also ask:

What is climate change in simple definition?

What is climate change Kid definition?

What is the importance of climate change?

What is the cause of climate change Wikipedia?

Climate - Sustainability - University of San Diego
Since 2010, USD has collaborated with San Diego leaders to create programs, policies, and strategies to address climate change. Through the Energy and ...
Advanced Google Search

❖ You can also use the operators in the search bar
❖ site: Search within one domain or top level domain (i.e., edu, gov)
❖ inurl: URL must contain the search term
❖ filetype: Find only a particular format (i.e., pdf)
❖ AROUND(X) Proximity search

❖ And so many more!
(For a longer list, see https://moz.com/learn/seo/search-operators)
The Wayback Machine is a service that allows people to visit archived versions of web sites.

Why?
- Trying to find information from a site that no longer exists
- Looking for a report that has been removed from a government website
- Curious to see what USD’s webpage used to look like

https://archive.org/web/
Christine Diaz on the best law school in her hometown...
URL Parsing
Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or web addresses, is the location of the website or document.

Understanding the way a website is organized can help you bypass a site’s navigation or find orphaned pages and information.

HTTP://www.example.com/index.html
Imagine that you’re looking for an article by professor Floyd Neiderman from volume 20, issue 2 of *Law and Technology*.

You’ve done some searching but the closest you’ve come is an article from volume 23, issue 3 at this address:


By editing the URL, we can try and find our way to the article we want.
Generally, going back through the URL will lead to index pages. So this would show us an index page for all issues and articles within Volume 23:


What if that fails?

We can infer the organizational structure from the URL and try manipulating it to find the document we need:

And always remember…

- The Reference Librarians are always here to help!